

ER visits, wait times up for US psychiatric patients

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(HealthDay)—One in five emergency physicians polled said they've had

psychiatric patients who needed hospitalization who had to wait two to five days before being assigned an inpatient bed. The findings from the survey were presented at the annual meeting of the American College of Emergency Physicians (ACEP), held from Oct. 16 to 19 in Las Vegas.

Three-quarters of emergency physicians said at least once a shift they see a patient who needs hospitalization for mental illness, according to the poll of more than 1,700 [emergency physicians](#). About half (48 percent) said that at least once a day, their emergency department ends up "boarding" a psychiatric patient who is awaiting admission to the hospital or transfer to another facility. Nearly three in five doctors (57 percent) also reported increased wait times and boarding for children with [psychiatric illnesses](#). In addition, only 16.9 percent of doctors reported having a psychiatrist on call to respond to psychiatric emergencies in the emergency department. More than 11 percent said they have no one at all on call for mental health emergencies—no social workers, psychologists, psychiatrists, or other professionals.

Two studies highlighted at ACEP's annual meeting further explained the deteriorating network of support for patients with [mental illness](#). Patients with bipolar disorder, psychosis, depression, or a combination of two or more diagnosed [psychiatric problems](#) are at increased odds of being in the emergency department for more than 24 hours, according to one of the studies.

Another study provided more detail regarding the pressure that psychiatric patients are placing on hospitals and emergency departments: 21 percent of psychiatric patients require admission to the hospital, compared with 13.5 percent of medical patients; 23 percent of psychiatric patients wait in the emergency department more than six hours, versus 10 percent of medical patients; 7 percent of psychiatric patients stay in the [emergency department](#) for more than 12 hours, versus just over 2 percent of medical patients; and 11 percent of

[psychiatric patients](#) end up transferred to another facility, compared with 1.4 percent of medical patients.

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